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AUTHOR Olson, Clark D.
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ABSTRACT

Data from five first-place orations from the earliest Interstate Oratorical contests (1874-1878) and five recent first-place orations (1978-1982) were analyzed to determine their subjects or prominent theme, the patterns of organization that were employed, and the types of evidence the speakers used. Following this, historical conclusions were drawn and the two periods were compared to determine the nature of oratory past and present. The analysis revealed that the subject matter of all the early orations was metaphysical. The topics of the later speeches were distinctly different in that they were much more refined in nature, each specifically explaining a particular problem, its causes and cures. There were also differences in the organizational patterns employed by the speakers. Most of the earliest speeches used a tree pattern of organization, with the subject matter being treated from the point from which it naturally unfolded or developed. The five contemporary speeches all fit into the motivated sequence pattern consisting of five steps: attention, need, satisfaction, visualization, and action. Earlier speeches also used significantly less evidence than the later speeches. The historical significance of all the speeches was most clearly seen in the subjects that were discussed. The earlier speeches focused on the Bible while the later speeches were characterized by a noted absence of references to great figures in literature, mythology, and--in particular--oratory.(HOD)

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WINNING ORATIONS:
AN HISTORICAL, COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE OF THE INTERSTATE ORATORICAL CONTEST

Clark D. Olson
Arizona State University

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INTRODUCTION

Persuasive speaking is an integral part of our culture and everyday lives, and has historically been one of the most important elements in the discipline of speech communication. For over one hundred years an organization has been functioning to bring together the best of persuasive speaking on the college level: the Interstate Oratorical Association. This organization was established in 1873 with the purpose of hosting outstanding collegiate speakers in an annual contest. In February of 1874, the first known intercollegiate contest in oratory was held in the United States. For the past one hundred ten years, superior speakers have competed in this contest, presenting a wide variety of persuasive speeches worthy of study. Considering the broad period of time which this contest spans, it would be interesting to learn if the components which constituted a successful speech over a century ago still hold true and are in popular use today.

The purpose of this paper is to study the subject matter, organizational patterns, and types of evidence used in winning orations from the beginning and end of this contest. It will also examine the historical significance of these speeches and compare and contrast the methods of rhetoric used by these successful oratory. It will compare the earliest winning orations with those of recent years to draw conclusions about the nature of oratory over the past one hundred years.

METHOD

The data studied were the five first-place orations from the earliest Interstate Oratorical contests (1874-1878) and five recent first-place orations (1978-1982). Textual criticism was employed to determine the

elements of these speeches. Once these characteristics were identified, a content analysis was done on each of the ten speeches to determine: (1) their subject and/or prominent theme(s); (2) the patterns of organization which were employed; and (3) the types of evidence which the speakers used.

Following this, historical conclusions were drawn and the two periods were compared to finally draw conclusions about the nature of oratory past and present. The speeches are listed chronologically in Appendix A and referred to numberically throughout the remainder of the paper.

SUBJECT MATTER

When selecting a topic George Baker suggested that speakers select a popular topic, "When a man treats a popular subject, everybody is willing to listen, ready to aid him with interest and applause."[1] However, he presented no guidelines as to what topics he believed were best for persuasion. During the early period, John Altgeld suggested which subjects should be included, "Great principles of justice, or government, or of human happiness, must be involved."[2]

Not surprisingly, the subject matter of all of the early orations is metaphysical. The earliest oration (1) dealt with art, particularly the art of oratory. The unique nature of this topic may have been due to the infant stage of the contest. It may have been an attempt to justify the existence of the competition. Three of the other orations of this early period also dealt with metaphysical concepts such as culture (2); science, invention, and religion (4); and genius/invention (5). The subject matter of all four of these orations seems similar. The lone exception in this period was an oration merely comparing two literary

figures. While this too may be seen as metaphysical, it could not be classified with the other four in that it more closely resembled the extolling of a criticism as opposed to any particular principle or concept as did the other four.

The topics of the later speeches are distinctly different in that they are much more refined in nature, each specifically explaining a particular problem, its causes and cures. It is interesting to note that all five of these speeches heed Altgeld's suggestions of justice, government or human happiness. Three speeches dealt with justice: the U.S. juvenile justice system (6); document fraud (7); and employee theft (10). One speech concentrated on the governmental issue of the new Christian right (9); and one centered on human happiness by advocating hospices for the terminally ill (8). It is odd to realize that in a very specific sense, all of these speeches fit under the umbrella of topics sanctioned nearly a century before as comprising good oratory.

ORGANIZATIONAL PATTERN

There are greater differences in the organization patterns employed by these speakers. Historically, Altgeld provided a metaphorical perspective by comparing the arrangement of oratory to a tree:

> The subject-matter should be treated from the point from which it naturally unfolds or develops. Start with the trunk of the tree, and then take up one branch after another so that the casual hearer can get a general idea of the whole subject, and then of its different branches, and see just what relations they bear to each other. The heavy, the statistical and historical parts of the subject should come early and form the foundation on which to build. Then the different branches must be arranged with reference to strength and climax--using the strongest toward the last.[3]

This pattern is sharply contrasted fourteen years later by James Winans. Again at the very end of his book he suggested a classical form for orations which included: the exordium, the beginning of the weaving; the exposition, the preliminary definition and explanation; the partition or proposition; the discussion or proof; the the peroration or conclusion, which often indicated the highlight or major consideration of the speech.[4]

These steps have been refined to comprise what is today known as the motivated sequence pattern of organization. This popular pattern has come to the fore of contemporary persuasive speaking and consists of five steps: attention, need, satisfaction, visualization, and action.[5]

Most of the earliest speeches could be identified with Altgeld's tree pattern of organization. Egbert's speech (1) on oratory began by substantiating the worth of oratory and then built the branches of the tree with topic paragraphs on books, truth, thoughts, and emotion. Likewise, Nolan (3) began his speech, "The World's Conqueror's," with the characteristics of "expansion and universality," and subsequently described the branches as science, invention, and religion. Similarly, Bancroft's speech (5), "The Loneliness of Genius," explicated the idea of solitariness with the branches of isolation: physical, mental, and emotional.

Only one speech from this early period (2) fit into Winans' classical form. In "Culture, A Basis of Brotherhood," Coultas painted a bleak picture of the history of the world in the exordium. In his exposition he remarked that yet from this foundation sprang culture. In the partition he proposed the need for culture, "Cultured minds must commune with each other, for upon this depends the march of intellect." The focus of the discussion was that culture was a common thread binding all people

together, bridging the gap of history, "bringing about a fraternity of minds." Finally in the peroration, Coultas concluded that "Culture is moral, . . .Culture inspires love and faith, . . ./Culture/ reveals a divine cause, . . ./and culture/ opens the world of life, . . ."

The other speech from this period (4) does not follow either pattern of organization, but merely seeks to justify the topic of the oration, "Satan and Mephistopheles," and discussed, almost eulogized, each title character.

The five contemporary speeches all fit nearly into the motivated sequence pattern. Brenner (6) began with an attention-getting story about Timmy, a fourteen-year-old boy who shot his sister. She then spent the greatest amount of time on the need step, explicating the failures of the U.S. juvenile justice system. She then proposed a three-step solution as the satisfaction stage and pointed out three cities, Portland, Denver, and Atlanta in which similar solutions have worked: the visualization step. Finally she concluded by indirectly calling for action by rhetorically asking the audience if they know a Timmy.

Parker (7) also used the motivated sequence. He provided an initial example of someone who attempted to sell the Eiffel Tower using a phoney deed. In the need stage, again the longest segment, he pointed out several ways in which life is governed by paper and documents from the moment of birth until after death. He also provided three solutions: change legislation, prosecution, and individual action, as the satisfaction step. The visualization step is tacitly integrated with each solution. And the conclusion called for action in an enthymematic way, recalling and extending his initial example which allowed the audience to affirm the need for action.

The style of Creasy's oratory (8) was somewhat different in focus from the previous two, but nevertheless followed the motivated sequence. She gained attention by quoting the Bible and then disagreeing with the quote. Her need step was very brief, stating, "According to the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, you and I stand a one in four chance of suddenly assuming unexpected responsibilities because someone in our family has been diagnosed as terminally ill." Creasy then began her satisfaction stage, which was the largest segment of her speech, providing numerous benefits of hospices. The visualization step was achieved by citing examples and testimony of hospice participants. Her final call to action was very specific to the individual, charging them to encourage governments to enhance the hospice movement, protect themselves by insurance plans which cover hospice programs, and finally by providing concern which is at the core of the hospice movement. This action step was the most direct of the five recent speeches.

Joeckel's speech (9) also has a distinct flavor. Similar to the first two, she began her attention step with a story. However, she wove the story into her need step, which again is the largest segment, bit did it very subtly, relying heavily on metaphors. She provided a two-part solution, defining and deterring the problem. Her satisfaction step was the most direct, stating how freedom of speech will be enhanced if her solutions are implemented. She concluded her speech with a warning, again from the Bible, which effectively called for action on the part of the audience.

Finally, Jacobson's speech (10) very closely resembles the method of arrangement used by Brenner and Parker. She began with an engrossing story to gain attention, explicated the problem in the need step using several specific instances, then again proposed a three-step solution

to the problem of employee theft: ". . .to defend, to deter, and to demotivate." Although she did not specifically follow through with these solution, she did provide a few alternative examples, through her visualization step was not overt. Finally she challenged her audience to action by stating, "Employee theft will stop when each one of use decided for ourselves, that the gain will be greater, to walk through the employee exit, with empty hands."

Clearly, all five of these speeches rather accurately typified the motivated sequence pattern of organization.

EVIDENCE

Many different types of evidence were used in the ten speeches. The earlier speeches were characterized by significantly less evidence than the later speeches. This could be due in large part to the expansion of the media in the last century. Without the numerous publications and prolific media of today, oratory of the nineteenth century were often forced to use general literary works for proof, frequently making sweeping statements or using argument from authority.

In discussing types of evidence, Baker cited four: illustration, examination, self-evidence, and figures.[6] It is not surprising to see statistics missing from this list as there were fewer uniform methods for gathering data in the nineteenth century, so the amount of statistics available was much less than today. Recen texts cite several different forms of evidence: explanation, analogy or comparison, illustration, specific instances, statistics, testimony, and restatement.[7] All of these forms of evidence can be found in the recent speeches.

These specific forms were rarely found in the early speeches. Egbert (1) relied heavily on the tales of mythology to underscore his ideas,

embellishing them with great rhetorical discourse. He relied on experts in the field of science, "Masters in the sciences tell us that the source of energy in the natural world is heat," and appealed to truth, "But truth cannot often be painted, nor principles chiseled." He did use several forms of quotations: a literary quotation from Horace, an ancient quotation from Demosthenes, and Patrick Henry's well-known patrictic quotation, "Give me liberty or give me death." Metaphors also played a major role of support for Egbert. For example, "The trumpet that has aroused the sluggish lethargy to activity, the faint-hearted from submission to oppression, to resistance of it, that has cheered the slave of appetite on in the struggle for kinship over self, has been the voice of the orator." Similarly, Coultas (2) also relied on metaphors, "Hence, through the medium of science these two men /Aritotole and Agassiz/ communed with each other, and across the chasms of centuries clasped the hand of brotherhood." Coultas also called upon masters of literature: Shakespeare, Milton and Bryant, comparing them to Virgil, Homer, and Isaiah. In no instance were direct quotes taken from the works of these men, instead merely their name was used for support. Great composers, such as Handel and Mozart and Biblical characters such as Moses and Miriam, were also used in this fashion, with the only quotations being familiar Bible passages, "Behold, behold the Lamb!" and "I see, I see the star!"

Metaphors also played a significant role in Nolan's speech (3), "Religion is to society what the sun is to the world." In discussing the various theories of science, invention and religion, Nolan also relied upon history to prove his claims. While discussing invention he stated, ". . .printing necessarily makes democracy." While discussing religion he cited events in the history of Christendom, and while

discussing science, merely pointed to a variety of scientific principles or discoveries which were commonly known. In Nolan's speech appeared the only statistic in the early speeches, "Since the Reformation, as is proven by statistics, the average length of human life has been nearly doubled." It is interesting that he particularly pointed out what type of evidence he used when he labeled it a statistic.

Curtis (4) relied solely on two kinds of support: mythodological and literary. He made reference to Hercules, but spent the majority of his speech quoting what literary critics had to say about his two title characters. In this sense, his speeach appeared to be more of a critical work than a persuasive or inspirational oration.

Religions metaphors characterized Bancroft's oration (5), "So genius, upborn by a faith that gazes upon the ineffable, holds lofty communion with the universal Soul above and around it." Bancroft also relied on men of literature: Dickens, Moore, and Coleridge, and also called upon the great minds of the Prophet at Horeb, Buddha, Dante, and Byron. All of these men were categorized as having genius qualities, particularly the quality of loneliness, though no direct proof was given.

All of the forms of evidence cited by Ehninger, et al., were used in the later speeches with illustrations, testimony, and statistics being the most popular.

Illustrations were used by all the speakers. Brenner (6) began her speech with the "Timmy" story, illustrating the perplexing nature of the juvenile justice system. Likewise Parker (7) both began and ended his speech with the same illustration, the illegitimate sale of the Eiffel Tower. Creasy (3) provided perhaps the best example of an illustration:

> This summer, a family friend's grandmother spent the last six weeks of her life in the hospital begging to go home. The family was unable to find someone willing to provide round-the-clock pain-killers to a ninety-three-year-old woman dying at home, and they called me to see if I knew of anyone. "The physical pain," they said, "doesn't hurt her half as much as not being home." Well, I didn't know of anyone--and two weeks later she died: in the hospital, by herself.

Joeckel (9) also began with an illustration, citing an appearance by Jerry Falwell, and Jacobson (10) followed suit, also introducing her speech with an illustration of employee theft.

Testimony was widely used by all five speakers, citing experts with whom the audience may or may not be familiar. Testimony by a wide variety of experts was used, typically from the field which pertained to the subject of the speech. In her speech on juvenile justice, Brenner (6) quoted Norval Morris, Dean of the University of Chicago Law School, Lloyd Ohlin of the Harvard Center for Criminal Justice, and Robert Carter and Malcolm Klein of the University of Southern California's School of Criminology, to name just a few. Similarly, Parker (7) quoted David Muchow, chairman of the Federal Advisory Commission on False Identification. For her medical topic, Creasy (8) quoted Dr. James Cimino, Susan Silver of the National Hospice Organization, and Joseph Califano, then Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare. Joeckel (9) relied less on testimony, quoting only Jerry Falwell and Ronald Reagan. Likewise, Jacobson (10) cited individual testimony only twice, but relied on the opinions, studies, and backing of large associations and corporations. From these speeches it is clear that all types of testimony are currently used, from government officials, Senator Birch Bayh (6) to family friends (10).

All speakers made liberal use of statistics, both from governmental

and private sources. Brenner (6) quoted several government sources, including FBI statistics. She also gave several statistics which were unqualified, "Despite Federal regularions forty percent of children in detention facilities are minor status offenders." Parker (7) quoted both government and independent statistics, while Creasy (8) used statistics from the Comptroller General, sociologists, and unnamed sources. Joeckel (9), again distinct from the other speakers, used statistics only as facts and did not make use of them to prove any specific claim. Jacobson (10) cited statistics only from the American Management Association, but did so numerous times. It can be stated that statistical proof was greatly relied upon for the majority of these speakers.

Explanations were used only by two of the recent speakers, Parker and Jacobson. Parker (7) used this form of support to explain statistics, "In 1977, according the the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports, there were over 62,000 arrests made in the United States for counterfeiting and forgery. That's an arrest every 8½ minutes." Jacobson (10) made a more practical interpretation of the fact that 15¢ of every retail dollar goes to cover stolen goods when she explained, "Employee theft is the major contributor to that 15%, that eats more of our paychecks than the inflation rate."

Jacobson (10) was also the only speaker who make use of analogies. For example:

> Employee theft is as easy as picking up a lunchbox and as common as calling in sick for work. Loose change finds its way into clerk's pockets, office supplies are restocked in people's homes or student dorm rooms, sheets and pillow cases make their home on hotel employees beds.

All speakers used at least one specific instance, from referring to a statistic, Brenner (6), "One New York City youth was shuffled around until he had attempted 25 rapes and 4 suicides," to recalling a personal example, Jacobson (10), ". . .I discovered the steak I was eating had been stolen from the college cafeteria."

Additionally, one speaker, Jaeckel (9) made liberal use of metaphors. In fact, major passages of her speech were connected by metaphors. A prime example follows in which she employed a cooking metaphor:

> In past election years, it has been said that if politicians discover their constituents are cannibals, they will promise them Christians for dinner. In 1980, the reverse was true. Evangelical members of the New Christian Right served up politicians, from the county week commissioner to the President of the United States with the zeal and expertise of French chefs. Lead by religious television figures such as Falwell, members of the movement concocted their elaborate recipe for success: Mix the country's 30 to 65 million Evangelical Protestants and Catholics together with heaping handfuls of conservative discontent. Add a dash of Salt II; blend in abortion, gay rights and Equal Rights Amendment, the Department of Education and sex education in public schools. Sprinkle liberally (if you will) with unconstitutional activity and tax law violation. Cook over high heat with plenty of fire and brimstone until November 4. Yield: the defeat of numerous liberal politicians targeted by the New Christian Right.

With the increase in the availability of evidence, the usage of restatement as a form of support increased. Speakers often used several different facts and examples to prove the same claim. From this discussion, it is apparent that evidence has come to play a much greater role in oration today.

HISTORICAL PERIODS COMPARED

The historical significance of all these speeches can most clearly be seen in the subjects which were discussed. In the earlier speeches,

which remained constantly popular was the Bible. The later speeches were characterized by a noted absence of references to great figures in literature, mythology, and particularly oratory. The three earliest speeches referred to renown orators: Demosthenes (1), Aristotle (2), Cicero (2,3), and Justinian (2). The names called upon in the later speeches were those who could provide expert testimony, specific for a particular subject.

A final historical sidelight which is interesting to note is the increasing presence of women in the later speeches. During the first five years of the contest, all winners were male. Perhaps this fact could be accounted for by the fewer number of women attending college in the nineteenth century. However, the acceptance of woman as orators has certainly grown as four of the five recent winners were women and women have narrowly outnumbered men in the elimination rounds for the past four years of the contest.

CONCLUSION

Outstanding speakers voice the concerns of their day and as these concerns change, so do the speeches which contain them. Examining speeches given in two historical periods has proven that ideas follow the march of time. Concerns of the day can be aired, and as these concerns change, the format for their presentation also changes. Cultural norms and availability of materials affect the content of the orations as the advancement of ideas and technology can be readily noted. So while few similarities in winning orations were found to remain constant over a period of one hundred ten years, the differences were readily identifiable and accounted for.

APPENDIX A

(1) 1874: T. Edward Egbert, "The Heart, The Source of Power"

(2) 1875: Thomas I. Coultas, "Culture, A Basis of Brotherhood"

(3) 1876: Charles T. Nolan, "The World's Conquerors"

(4) 1877: Olin A. Curtis, "Satan and Mephistopheles"

(5) 1878: E. A. Bancroft, "The Lineliness of Genius"

(6) 1978: Ruth A. Brenner, "The Juvenile Justice Game"

(7) 1979: Don Parker, "The Paper Pushers"

(8) 1980: Kenda Creasy, "A Time For Peace"

(9) 1981: Kate Joeckel, "When the Intolerant Rule. . ."

(10) 1982: Bonnie J. Jacobson, "Empty Hands"

END NOTES

[1]George Pierce Baker, Principles of Argumentation, (Boston: Ginn & Company, Publishers, 1895), p. 346.

[2]John P. Altgeld, Oratory Its Requirements and Rewards, (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1901), p. 47.

[3]Ibid., pp. 10-11.

[4]James Albert Winans, Publis Speaking, Principles and Practice, (Ithaca, NY: Sewell Publishing Company, 1915), p. 453.

[5]Douglas Ehninger, Allan Monroe, and Bruce Gronbeck, Principles and Types of Speech Communication, Eigth edition. (Glenview, IL: Scott Foresman and Company, 1978), p. 145.

[6]Baker, p. 196.

[7]Ehninger, et al., pp. 401-403 and Bert E. Bradley, Fundamentals of Speech Communication, Third edition. (Dubuque, IA: Wm. C. Brown Company Publishers, 1981), pp. 254-264.